

Myths vs. Facts

Content and Quality: General

Myth: *Adopting common standards will bring all states' standards down to the lowest common denominator, which means states with high standards, such as Massachusetts, will be taking a step backwards if they adopt the Standards.*

Fact: The standards were designed to build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college and careers. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level. In fact, since this work began, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The standards are informed by the best in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and expertise about educational outcomes. We need college and career ready standards because even in high-performing states students are graduating and passing all the required tests and still require remediation in their post-secondary work.

Myth: *The standards are not internationally benchmarked.*

Fact: International benchmarking played a significant role in both sets of standards. In fact, the college and career readiness standards include an appendix listing the evidence that was consulted in drafting the standards and the international data consulted in the benchmarking process.

Myth: *The standards only include skills and do not address the importance of content knowledge.*

Fact: The standards recognize that both content and skills are important. In English-language arts, the standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In mathematics, the standards lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

Content and Quality: Math

Myth: *The standards do not prepare or require students to learn Algebra in the 8th grade, as many states' current standards do.*

Fact: The standards do accommodate and prepare students for Algebra 1 in 8th grade, by including the prerequisites for this course in grades K-7. Students who master the K-7 material will be able to take Algebra 1 in 8th grade. At the same time, grade 8 standards are also included; these include rigorous algebra and will transition students effectively into a full Algebra 1 course.

Myth: *Key math topics are missing or appear in the wrong grade.*

Fact: The mathematical progressions presented in the common core are coherent and based on evidence. Part of the problem with having 50 different sets of state standards is that today, different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

Content and Quality: English Language Arts

Myth: *The standards suggest teaching Grapes of Wrath to 2nd graders.*

Fact: The ELA Standards suggest Grapes of Wrath as a text that would be appropriate for 9th or 10th grade readers. Evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is demanded in college and the workplace, creating a gap between what high school students can do and what they need to be able to do. The Common Core State Standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity, so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts.

Myth: *The standards are just vague descriptions of skills; they don't include a reading list or any other similar reference to content.*

Fact: The standards do include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards. The exemplars of high quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities and have been very well received. This provides teachers with the flexibility to make their own decisions about what texts to use – while providing an excellent reference point when selecting their texts.

Myth: *English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials.*

Fact: With the Common Core ELA Standards, English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary non-fiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelmingly focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in history and science. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines are also focusing on reading and writing to build knowledge within their subject areas.

Myth: *The standards don't have enough emphasis on fiction/literature*

Fact: The standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Process

Myth: *No teachers were involved in writing the standards.*

Fact: The Common Core State Standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, there were many state experts that came together to create a thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together.

Myth: *The standards are not based on research or evidence.*

Fact: The standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research; surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college-and career-ready performance; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.

In English-language arts, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In Mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries that the traditional US mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of a curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Implementation

Myth: *The standards tell teachers what to teach.*

Fact: The best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That’s why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

Myth: *The standards will be implemented through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – signifying the federal government will be leading them.*

Fact: The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of NCLB and adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory. States began the work to create clear, consistent standards before the Recovery Act or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act blueprint were released because this work is being driven by the needs of the states, not the federal government.

Myth: *These standards amount to a national curriculum for our schools.*

Fact: The standards are not a curriculum. They are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.